

1. Introduction to Buddhist Meditation

The top 10 posts in this section describe a way of using meditation in following the Noble Path and to attain the *Sōtapanna* stage of *Nibbāna*. The rest of the posts in this section are on possible meditation subjects and together with other posts at the site can be used to clarify unresolved questions, and to gain *samādhi*. It is recommended that the first 11 posts be followed in that order, at least initially.

1. We can get an idea of what “Buddhist Meditation” is, by looking at the Path described by the Buddha to achieve various stages of *Nibbāna*. *Nibbāna* is not an esoteric concept as many believe. That is why I like the synonyms “*niveema*” or “cooling down” because these terms do convey *Nibbāna* as something that is approached systematically and can be EXPERIENCED in the early stages even before the *Sōtapanna* stage.

- “*Rāgakkhayō Nibbānan, Dōsakkhayō Nibbānan, Mōhakkhayō Nibbānan*”, gives the essence of how this “cooling down” is attained.
- The more one gets rid of greed, hate, and ignorance, the more one experiences *Nibbāna* or “*niveema*” or “cooling down”.
- One does not, and one cannot, get rid of greed, hate, and ignorance in a few days. It is a gradual process. One can experience the “cooling down” to the extent one can purify the mind. And there will be ups and downs, especially in the early days, thus ONE MUST HAVE THE RESOLVE to stay on the Path.
- **Some people just stay with breath meditation for “stress reduction”, and actually avoid anything to do with *Nibbāna*.** They equate *Nibbāna* with extinction, but there is no need to worry; [the fact that one has that mindset means that one is nowhere close to *Nibbāna*](#). I am not saying this in a derogatory way, but just as a fact. Until one experiences some “cooling down”, and get some idea about *anicca, dukkha, anatta*, it is very difficult to get an idea of what *Nibbāna* is.

2. Meditation provides ways to achieve this “cooling down” for the three types of people who are interested in meditation:

- Many people just want to practice some basic meditation that the Buddha advocated for achieving some “inner peace”.
- Some are convinced about the rebirth process, but are mainly concerned about getting a “good birth” in the next life.
- The main goal of this site is to provide enough material for one to attain the first stage of *Nibbāna*, the *Sōtapanna* stage. After that, one does not need outside help to complete the rest of the journey. However, there are many people who are either not ready to take that task yet, or are not yet convinced about the existence of 31 realms, process of rebirth, or *Nibbāna*.

3. In several posts I have tried to give an idea of what this “cooling down” is. You may want to read them again. They vary from a basic description to deeper details. Yet, they all deal with reducing greed, hate, and ignorance from our minds.

- The words greed and hate are clear, but many do not understand what is meant by ignorance. The post, “[What is Avijja \(Ignorance\)?](#)” gives a bit deeper description, but since it is really important, I want to say a few words here about ignorance.
- The “traditional method” for achieving some “cooling down” or “calming sensation” is to do “breath meditation” or “*kasina* meditation”. **As I questioned in several posts, how can the greed, hate, or ignorance be removed via concentrating on one’s breath or some *kasina* object? Such meditation techniques DO NOT remove ignorance, and only SUPPRESS greed and hate.**
- [We need to start gradually reducing greed and hate from our minds; this called “*silā*” \(pronounced “seela”\) or moral living.](#) Then one’s mind become clear, one starts feeling the *nirāmisa sukha*, and it will become easier to grasp Dhamma concepts and get rid of *avijjā*.

- Buddha Dhamma is for the wise; it is not to be followed by blind faith but with understanding. One needs to learn and “see” Dhamma first. A sustained “Cooling down” cannot be attained via following a set procedure like watching the breath.
- In fact, one could go a long way (up to the *Sōtapanna* stage) just by learning Dhamma and comprehending the key concepts. When one grasps the key concepts, it begins to dawn on oneself that it does not make sense to be too greedy, or to hate someone with a level of hatred that makes one’s heart to “heat up” to uncomfortable levels.
- Thus through better understanding of Dhamma (i.e., removing ignorance), one automatically “cools down”. [Removing ignorance via learning Dhamma leads automatically to reducing greed and hate.](#)

4. This is why “*Sammā Ditthi*” or “Correct Vision” comes first in the Noble Eightfold Path. **Actually “*sammā*” means “*san*” + “*mā*” or “removing defilements”; but for brevity we will use the word “correct”. But keep in mind that “*sammā ditthi*” means “removing defilements through correct vision”.** I cannot emphasize enough the importance of learning Dhamma. This is the first BIG step. Without understanding the message of the Buddha, how can one follow his Path?

- When one starts to understand the key Dhamma concepts, one constantly tend to think about such concepts and how they should be kept in mind while going through daily chores. This is “*sammā sankappa*” or “correct concepts”. This automatically lead to “*sammā vācā*” (correct speech), “*sammā kammanta*” (correct action), *sammā ājiva* (correct livelihood).
- When these five steps are followed, one becomes attuned to correct mindfulness (“*sammā sati*”). Yes. There is an “incorrect mindfulness” (“*miccā sati*”, pronounced “*michchā sathi*”) too, like when a master thief plans a robbery. One needs to be “engaged” or fully focused to accomplish any task either good or bad.
- With cultivated “*sammā sati*”, one will be able to “see” the consequences of any action very quickly and decide whether to go ahead with it (since only good can come out of that action) or to abandon it (because it is not good for oneself or to others).
- When one sees the benefits of these steps (i.e., “cooling down”) one will be motivated to work harder on all these steps, i.e., one cultivates “*sammā vayama*” (correct effort).
- The culmination is “*sammā samādhi*” (correct calm state of mind). Yes. There is a “*micca samādhi*” too: When that master thief is planning a big robbery, he gets into a kind of *samādhi* too; he feels a sense of calm too, but that will have very bad consequences down the road.
- Actually the latter three develop at the same time. In fact, one could get into “*sammā samādhi*” just via “*sammā ditthi*”. When one listens attentively to a Dhamma talk or gets absorbed in reading about a key Dhamma concept, it is possible that one could get into “*samādhi*”; a *jhānic* state is a deeper *samādhi* state.

5. This is why I recommend everyone to read these posts during a quiet time. [One will absorb more and just by contemplating on the material while reading one could easily get into *samādhi*.](#) This is what meditation is all about. “Absorbing the good” will automatically force the “bad” out, and one gets into *samādhi* automatically; we will talk about this “*ānapāna*” process in the following posts.

- It will get to the point that one can sit down and get into a *jhāna* within a minute or two. But that will take time.
- I hope you will be able to experience the LONG TERM benefits from the procedures we discuss in this post and the followup posts. Initially, it will be a bit slow, but if one sticks with it for a few months, one should be able to see a change in oneself that is not merely a temporary relief. For some it will be faster.

6. In this life we feel two kinds of suffering: bodily pains and aches as well as various diseases and mental suffering (disappointments to depression).

- Bodily ailments take time to recover; even those can be reduced by careful planning and being mindful too. If one engages in physical activity (ranging from walking to rigorous exercise) and be mindful of what one eats, many such ailments can be reduced over time.
- Mental suffering could have direct causes in greed, hate, and ignorance. While some are due to past *kamma*, most can be avoided or reduced by being mindful of what one thinks, speaks, and

does. Any thought, speech, or bodily action arising from a greedy, hateful, or ignorant thought is going to cause mental anguish sooner or later.

- The easiest way to determine whether any action is bad is to contemplate on the consequences: if it is going to harm oneself or another being, then that action is rooted in greed, hate, or ignorance.

7. Thus Buddhist meditation is basically to cultivate the Noble Eightfold Path.

- By preventing from killing, stealing, verbal abuse, etc, what we are effectively doing is to “put out existing fires” in our minds and also prevent such “future fires” from starting. This is “*niveema*” or “cooling down” or *Nibbāna*.
- We should also do things that will help with such moral behavior: associating with like-minded people and environments, actively engaging in opposite moral behavior that makes the heart joyful, etc.
- The most important thing is to learn Dhamma so that one can “see” how all this will liberate one’s mind on a PERMANENT basis. The change becomes “permanent” only when this step is achieved.

When perfected, one will be doing meditation all day long while doing daily chores; this is what the Buddha described as “*āsevitāya, bhāvithāya, bahuleekathāya*” or “associate and use what is good, and do that as much as possible”.

- In a formal meditation session one does the same. The best is to read a post or two on a given Dhamma concept just before (or during) the session and then contemplate on those ideas. It is important to compare those concepts with one’s life experiences, and things will become clear with time: for example, why it is unfruitful to “live life lavishly, especially if that involves hurting oneself or others”.
- You will be surprised that this process itself will get you to *samādhi*, and even *jhānas* in the long term. But we will discuss some other variations too.
- As I have mentioned in several posts, one could even get to the *Sōtapanna* stage just via comprehending the key Dhamma concepts to some extent.

8. Buddha Dhamma is all about the mind; Anything we say or do also start with a thought. The Buddha said, “*manōpubbangamā dhammā...*”, “the mind takes precedence over everything else..”.

- It should be clear from the above discussion that Buddha’s meditation techniques are attuned to Nature’s laws. They can be followed by one with a religious background or by an atheist.
- One becomes a “*Bhauddhayā*” or a “Buddhist” in his/her mind. If one understands some basic Dhamma concepts and lives by them, then one is automatically a Buddhist. After one gets started with a firm determination on the Path, “*Dhammō havē rakkathi dhammacāri*”, or “Dhamma will guide one to be on the right Path”.
- The foremost goal is to live a moral life without causing harm to oneself or others, and to seek some “peace of mind” from the modern hectic life. That is our starting point.

9. I also recommend listening to the following discourse for anyone seriously considering Buddhist meditation ([You need to adjust volume control on your computer](#)):

“**The Hidden Suffering that We All Can Understand**“

Audio Player

00:00

00:00

[Use Up/Down Arrow keys to increase or decrease volume.](#)

[Download](#)

This is in the post, “[Starting on the Path Even without Belief in Rebirth](#)” in the “[Living Dhamma Overview](#)” subsection of the “[Living Dhamma](#)” section.

Next, [“The Basics”](#),

2. The Basics in Meditation

The top 10 posts in this section describe a way of using meditation in following the Noble Path and to attain the *Sotapanna* stage of *Nibbana*. The rest of the posts in this section are on possible meditation subjects and together with other posts at the site can be used to clarify unresolved questions, and to gain *samadhi*. It is recommended that the first 11 posts be followed in that order, at least initially.

1. Those who are doing breath meditation or “watching the stomach rise and fall” know that it is relatively easy for some to calm the mind compared to others. Some cannot even keep a calm mind for more than few minutes; things start “popping up” in the mind.

- This “popping up” is due to the five hindrances (*panca nivarana*) that I have described in a post. These are the basic “residues” or “gunk” that we have deep inside our minds that start bubbling up to the surface when we sit down to meditate.

2. Let us take the simile of a water well that is contaminated with all the rotten stuff that have fallen into it over many years; our minds have accumulated gunk over repeated births, not just in this life. When we are engaged in stressful day-to-day activities, those activities stir up the ‘gunk’ and the mind gets clouded; it is like taking a long pole and stirring the well water; the “gunk” at the bottom come up.

- The two basic “rotten things” we have are the first two on the list of the five hindrances: *kammaccanda* (excessive greed) and *vyāpada* (deep hate).
- *Vicikiccā* is a set of person “likings”, and these can be likings for material things OR things that one likes to “hate”; one does these because of the ignorance of *anicca*, *dukkha*, *anatta*. *Vicikiccā* is sort of like a “favorite list” from the main ingredients of excessive greed and deep hate, the first two hindrances. ***Kanka vicikiccā* is a worse form of *vicikiccā* that arises due to wanton disregard of correct views.**
- The other two are more like “stirrers”, that stir up these bad habits and bring them up on their own: *tina middha* (“trapped” or “frozen” mind), *uddhacca-kukkucca* (tendency of the mind to be scattered; an excited mind).
- *Tina middha* or inability to concentrate on dhamma concepts can be enhanced after a meal, but it can be a personal characteristic or a habit; we will call this the “lazy mind”. An “unsettled” or “excited” mind (*uddhacca-kukkucca*) is also personal, and arises when one feels “superior” or “inferior” compared to others: it must be noted that a “shrunk mind” associated with inferiority is not to be confused with an “unassuming character”.
- The five hindrances are discussed in detail in the Moral Living section.

3. When we are engaged in day-to-day activities, we see, hear, smell, taste, touch, and also think about all sorts of things; all these are “external stirrers” that really make our minds look like whirlpools. All these gang up to get the mind to stress out and “heat up”. This is the tension that we feel in a busy day. We need to “cool down”; we need “*niveema*”.

- one way to “cool down” is to turn off those external stirrers temporarily. This is what some people do in a breath meditation session: one goes to a quiet place and closes eyes; this will turn off mainly the five physical senses (i.e., we do not see, hear, smell, taste, touch). This really helps to calm the mind for some people, especially if they have practiced a lot.
- But it is not possible to turn off the sixth one, the mind itself. This is why it is instructed to try to fix the mind on one object, say the breath or the rising of the stomach.
- Actually, some people try to “turn off the mind”, or try to stop thoughts from arising. This is DANGEROUS. We need to PURIFY the mind, not to turn it off. The Buddha had the perfectly pure, but very active mind. When one follows the Path, one’s mind will become sharper, not inactive.

4. However, if we have too much gunk in our minds, then our thoughts will be contaminated even without the aid of a stirrer. It is like an old well that had been abandoned. It has dirty water, and one needs to REMOVE the existing dirty water first.

- Similarly, if one is engaged in immoral behavior (**the BIG EIGHT**: killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, lying, gossiping, slandering, harsh speech, and getting “drunk” with not only drugs or alcohol, but also with wealth, fame, power, etc), then the mind is like a well that has dirty water to begin with. Even if stays undisturbed, the water cannot get any cleaner by sitting in a quiet place and turning off the physical senses.

5. Thus it would be hard to even to achieve calmness with breath meditation if one is actively engaged in the BIG EIGHT (unless one has had a lot of practice, but even then the calmness lasts only until the focus is held).

- This is basically *kayanupassana*, the first step in *Satipatthana*; see, “[Satipatthana – Introduction](#)”.
- Therefore, if someone is engaged in one or more of those eight activities, the first thing to do is to try to get rid of them. First start with the worst, and proceed gradually until all are removed. It is like emptying the well of the dirty water.
- This is a BIG STEP. It may take a little while, depending on how much cleaning to be done. But one thing is not to rush out and try to do much. That could be stressful too. The best thing to do is to abstain from one or two big ones, and experience the “cooling down” that results from it.
- Vain talk is a habit that should be gotten rid of early. It does not do any good to oneself or the others. It is inevitable that one will say something inappropriate (possibly slandering, and lying too, which are also in the BIG EIGHT) when one gets carried away during vain talk. Getting rid of it will help with being able to calm the mind quickly.
- The mind needs to see the benefits of doing something before it really gets on board. This is why initially it may take a lot of determination to stick with the plan.
- **It is important NOT to get used to the breath meditation; if you are used to it, I would urge you to gradually stop and try the procedures described here at least for a couple of months. We want LONG TERM results, and there are many people who get addicted to breath meditation to get temporary relief. THAT IS A MISTAKE.**

6. Getting rid of bad old habits and installing new good habits is a KEY in the meditation practice; we will talk about habits (“*gathi*” which become “*āsavas*” over time) in more detail in the next section. Here are some basic ideas that would be helpful:

- To form a new habit, initially it takes some effort. I tried it out by making a new habit of peeling oranges with my left hand (I am right-handed). Initially it was hard, and the main problem was that I kept forgetting to use the left hand. I had to set an alarm to remind myself first. But after a few days, I started remembering, and after a week or two, the new habit was working. Now I automatically do it, and now it is a bit strange to try to peel oranges with the right hand!
- When we make a new habit, a set of neurons in the brain start to wire together for that task; the more we do it, the stronger the neural connections become. This is what happens when we learn to ride a bike, drive a car, or zillions of other things that we do without even thinking about it; see, “[True Brain: How the Mind Rewires the Brain via Meditation/Habits](#)” and “[How Habits are Formed and Broken – A Scientific View](#)”.
- In breaking a habit one needs to do the reverse. When one starts to smoke less and less, the neural connections for that task will get weaker and weaker. After a while, it will become easier not to smoke; brain will stop giving that signal. So it is critical to have the determination to hold off the urge in the beginning. Try to replace that activity with something else at that time. Craving for a food item can be removed the same way, and much more, including our bad habits such as lying, gossiping, etc. It is the same principle.

7. [The basic formal meditation technique is described in the next section. For those of who need time to get rid of the BIG EIGHT, they can also monitor the progress by doing such formal meditation](#)

sessions. It is important to realize that all defilements are removed only at the *Arahant* stage. So, there is no point in getting discouraged if it takes time to stop bad habits; **the key is to make progress, and not to go backward.**

- Sometimes when one starts on the *Ariya Bhavana*, things may look worse before getting better. It is like trying to cool a hot iron by sprinkling water on it, when all that smoke comes out and may appear to be getting worse. But one needs to be persistent. One needs to keep in mind that uncountable beings have attained “cooling down” by having faith in the Buddha.

Next, “[The Second Level – Key to Purify the Mind](#)“,

3. The Second Level – Key to Purify the Mind

The top 10 posts in this section describe a way of using meditation in following the Noble Path and to attain the *Sōtapanna* stage of *Nibbāna*. The rest of the posts in this section are on possible meditation subjects and together with other posts at the site can be used to clarify unresolved questions, and to gain *samādhi*. It is recommended that the first 11 posts be followed in that order, at least initially.

1. Let us go back to the example of the abandoned well. Now we have done a decent job of cleaning the dirty water that had been there for a long time, i.e., we have reduced at least some of the main immoral acts, the BIG EIGHT.

- **Now we need to make sure that things do not fall into the well while we try to make the water even more cleaner;** if there is no barrier around it, when it rains mud water can fall into the well. As with the well, we need to make sure that we keep those BIG EIGHT out of our minds as much as possible. **This is ‘*sila*’ (pronounced “seela”) or moral living.**

2. In order to make sure that we will not drift back to the old ways, we need to cultivate moral mindfulness (“*sati*“): we need to be on the “lookout” for any temptations to break the BIG EIGHT. But there is a catch that most people do not comprehend: bad habits and cravings or “*gathi/āsavas*” that we have are not only from this life, but possibly from previous lives as well.

3. Again, we can use the old water well as an example: When we drained the water out of the well, the well starts filling up with water from underground fresh water oozing through cracks (from underground aquifers) which is pure.

- However, if there is a of rotten stuff at the bottom of the well that had been there for a long time, then that pure water gets contaminated. Our bad habits (*gathi/āsavas*) are like the dirt at the bottom of the well.

4. The water in the above well will now look relatively more clear if it is undisturbed, i.e, when we let the water to settle down. **This is effectively what we do in breath meditation or any such *samatha* meditation.** When someone is abstaining from the BIG EIGHT, it is relatively easy to calm the mind by going to a quiet place, closing the eyes, and then focusing one object, say the breath.

- Such meditations are *anāriya* meditations; they provide only temporary relief. One could also get into *anāriya jhānas* this way, with lots of practice, especially if one could live a secluded life. Ancient *yogis* who lived moral lives and stayed away from other humans in forests could attain higher *jhānas*.
- What happens here is that the five hindrances are kept SUPPRESSED. It is like the rotten stuff kept undisturbed at the bottom of the well.
- If one takes a long pole and stir the well, those contaminants start coming up.

5. In the same way, when someone comes out of the quiet place, one gets “disturbed” with external sense stimuli (i.e., when a particularly strong sense object is presented). For someone with a lot of lust,

it could be a picture of an attractive person. If someone has a lot of hate towards another, then hateful thoughts can come to the surface just by someone mentioning that person's name.

- This “bubbling up of bad stuff to the surface” is called “*anusaya*“. To stop such *anusaya*, those *gathi/āsava* need to be removed (gradually).
- These terms are explained in, “[Gathi \(Gati\), Anusaya, and Āsava](#)“.
- This is why people who have a very calm and peaceful experience at a meditation resort come back to regular hectic life and see that experience fade away gradually. That is because it WAS a temporary solution. [What we have in mind here is a more permanent solution. But this approach takes a bit more time.](#)

5. So, how do we really clean the well? It is not enough to let the gunk to sink back to the bottom; we need to remove the gunk that has accumulated at the bottom of the well. There could even be toxic things down there. Thus it takes an effort to remove all those. Once those are removed, there is nothing down there that can contaminate the fresh water coming out. When the well fills up we only need to make sure that things do not fall back in to contaminate the well.

- Similarly, what we need to do with our minds is to remove the bad habits (*gathi/āsavas*) that have been accumulated over countless past lives and reinforced in this life. If we have hate in our minds, that hate can triggered easily. This is why some people are prone to “flare-ups” than others. If we have extreme greed, we can be tempted easily to act immorally for sense satisfaction through any of the six senses.
- Even though the main ones are greed and hate, there are uncountable number of combinations (when included with ignorance). That is why we see uncountable number of habits/personalities/tendencies in different people. **No two persons are alike, even identical twins.**

5. Looking at the five hindrances, the main culprits are of course, greed, hate, and *vicikicca* (the particular set of things one has a liking for, which can be things liked or disliked). The other two help bring out these: the “lazy mind” will not take any effort to suppress bad thoughts; the “dispersed mind” is too dispersed to be focused, to think clearly. All these are intimately connected to the habits (*gathi/āsavas*).

- By the way, if one can remove all the *gathi/āsavas*, that is when one attains *Nibbana*. The Buddha realized the “*āsavakkhaya nana*” just before attaining the Buddhahood. *āsavakkhaya* is “*āsava*+”*khaya*” or removing the temptations; “*khaya*” is the getting rid of “*san*“; see, “[What is “San”? – Meaning of samsāra \(or Samsara\)](#)“.
- Here we are trying to remove some easily removable less potent habits, and at least try to reduce the big ones. The good news is that we can EXPERIENCE the relief or “cooling down” or “*niveema*” each time we either remove a small bad habit or lessen the severity of bigger ones. We don't have to remove ALL bad habits/cravings in order to experience the “cooling down”.

6. After making a commitment to abstain from the BIG EIGHT as much as possible, we need to sort out our bad habits.

- Make a list with little things on the top and more serious things towards the bottom. We all have greed and hate; those are the “big ones”; what we need to do here is to try to remove easily identifiable smaller bad habits; for example, explosive temper, stinginess, seeking too much sense pleasures (i.e., being addicted to alcohol, drugs, even excess eating).
- It is important to get rid of the ones at the top (the easy ones), and that will provide incentive to continue. If one tries to tackle the big ones straight away, one might get discouraged and give up the whole effort.

7. Of course, focusing on the BIG EIGHT is very important. If one is engaging in killing animals for pleasure (e. g., fishing), then that needs to be stopped if one is serious about meditation. If one is making a living by stealing from others, that needs to be stopped. If one is engaged in sexual activities with other married people, that needs to be stopped, etc.

- Those are common sense things too. If one looks at one's actions and see that it can cause harm for oneself AND/OR others, then one needs to seriously start thinking ways to initially reduce and eventually to stop such actions.

8. There are several posts on habits and *gathi/āsavas*; you may want to find and read them. And contemplate on those ideas. An English discourse on this topic is given in the post, "[How Are Gati and Kilesa Incorporated into Thoughts?](#)".

- As I emphasized at the beginning, one has to make an effort; even the Buddha could only show the way. We need to examine what he suggested, think through to make sure they make sense. Then the mind gets on-board, especially when it starts seeing the benefits, even small benefits.
- The key is to get started; when one accomplishes even a small goal that provides the fuel to go further.

9. One could and should use the "four bases of mental power (*satara iddhipāda*)" in accomplishing these goals. Tackle one goal at a time. As you accomplish more and more goals, the *iddhipāda* (*chanda, citta, viriya, vimansa*) will grow as well. These are the critical factors that the *yogis* used to cultivate mundane (*anāriya*) *jhānas* and gain extraordinary mental powers too.

- *Chanda* is the desire to achieve the goal. *Citta* is the determination one makes and the *viriya* is the effort that one puts in to get it done. *Vimansa* is careful examination of the benefits of breaking the habit and the possible repercussions of keeping the habit. As the four *iddhipāda* grow (with accomplishment of more and more goals), the *vimansa* faculty grows in particular; this is a facet of wisdom (*panna*).

10. In trying to remove any bad habit, it is essential to look at the negative repercussions or bad consequences (called *ādeenava* or *ādinava*) from that activity. Let us take the bad habit of getting into a rage as an example:

- Think about the unpleasant feeling of getting "heated up" in a moment of rage. Of course, at the moment of rage one may actually enjoy it: In extreme cases, this is why there are people dead with 30-40 stab wounds, when all it takes to kill a person a couple of stabs; such is the danger of getting into a rage. One feels bad about it only later, and then it is too late.
- Even worse are the *samsāric* consequences: If rage becomes a dominant characteristic of one's personality, it is possible that this is what will be grasped at the moment of death and a birth of a "similar kind" could result, i.e., birth in a burning hell (this is the principle of *paticca samuppāda*: "*pati+ichcha*" leading to "*sama+uppāda*").

11. Let us take a few examples to see how some bad habits can be tackled:

- Many people have bad temper (which could develop in to hate) which is a result of *vyāpāda*. Yes. This is a *samsāric* habit, and unlike many other habits, this one is hard to control when triggered. This is one that needs to be dealt with when the anger is absent. The best is do the *mettā bhāvanā*. We will use the *āriya mettā bhāvanā* later. For now, one could close the eyes at a quite time, and sincerely say, "May all beings be free of suffering, free of ailments, free of anger, and be happy". If you have a particular person that you are not in good terms, repeat with his/her name. We cannot remove the anger in the mind of that person. We can only remove the anger within ourselves. Do this a couple of times a day and if you do it sincerely it will give results (for YOU to have a peace of mind).
- If you are a person with cravings for sense pleasures (I do not mean necessities), your mind is likely to be frequently seeking such things. Try to cut down on such activities, and also try to do more giving. Donate to charities, give a few dollars to a homeless person. All these will make you feel better; this is called *pīti* ("*preethi*" in Sinhala or joy).
- Also, when you simplify your life, the burden on your mind will be less, and you will get a different kind of joy than that from sense pleasures; this is "*niveema*" or "cool down", or *nirāmisā sukha*; see, "[Nirāmisā Sukha](#)".
- Alcohol or cigarette addiction is another example. Instead of trying to stop such a habit "cold turkey", it is better to cut down gradually. But one MUST have the discipline (the importance

of cultivating the *iddhipāda* comes here) to stick to the plan, and not go back. It also helps to find a replacement activity at that time (taking a less potent drink or chewing a gum, etc). One of the four *iddhipāda* that is essential here is *citta* or determination.

12. Now we are at a point where I can introduce the real *ānāpānasati bhāvanā* that was described by the Buddha.

Next, "[What do all these Different Meditation Techniques Mean?](#)",

4. What Do All These Different Meditation Techniques Mean?

The top 10 posts in this section describe a way of using meditation in following the Noble Path and to attain the *Sōtapanna* stage of *Nibbāna*. The rest of the posts in this section are on possible meditation subjects and together with other posts at the site can be used to clarify unresolved questions, and to gain *samādhi*. It is recommended that the first 11 posts be followed in that order, at least initially.

1. Buddha Dhamma is focused on purifying the mind of greed, hatred, and ignorance. A pure mind does not attach to even a trace of material form and has attained *Nibbāna*. As the mind is purified, it gains *nirāmisā sukha* which can be experienced at various levels from the beginning. If one can “stick to” this program for a couple of months, and then one can look back and see the change in oneself; one should have a more peaceful, quiet mind that has “cooled down”.

- A mind is impure because it attaches to “things in this world” with the misconception that things in this world (31 realms) can be maintained to one’s satisfaction, i.e., with the perception of *nicca*. Thus the prevailing mindset is that happiness (*sukha*) should be attained by employing any means. And once attained it can be maintained and thus one is in total control of one’s affairs (*atta*).
- These three misconceptions of *nicca, sukha, atta* are the three culprits that keep us bound to “this world” of 31 realms, i.e., bound to the endless rebirth process in *sansara*. What the Buddha showed was that the actual reality of “this world” is described by the three characteristics of *anicca, dukkha, anatta*: No matter how hard we try, we cannot maintain things to our satisfaction in the long term (*anicca*), thus we get distraught (*dukkha*), and thus we are not in control (*anatta*).

2. I am NOT saying that one should not work hard to get educated and get a good job. That MUST be done; one cannot have a peace of mind if one is hungry and homeless. But we also need to be aware of the FACT that all mundane achievements are temporary; even if we get a live this life without a major catastrophe, we have to leave all behind when we die.

- One acts with greed, hate, and ignorance and makes the mind impure because of the wrong perceptions of *nicca, sukha, atta*. One is willing to do immoral acts to get some temporary satisfaction, because one does not see the bad consequences of such actions. However, when one truly understands the reality, i.e., *anicca, dukkha, anatta*, one is automatically prevented from doing such immoral acts even compulsively.
- For that stage to be reached, one has to train one’s mind to “take in the good” and “reject the bad”; one needs to change one’s habits and this is done basically with the *ānāpānasati* meditation.

The following is a logical sequence for meditation:

3. First one needs to sort out what is good and what is bad, and the consequences of good and bad actions. This is why the vision, *sammā ditthi*, comes first in the Noble Eightfold Path, and this is done by “sorting out the good from the bad”.

- *Vipassanā* (*vi+passa* means sort and discard, where “*vi*” is to sort out and “*passa*” is to discard) and *vidassanā* (*vi+dassana* means sort out by clear vision, where “*dassana*” means the vision) mean the same thing: understand Buddha Dhamma and acquire the vision needed to be able to sort out the “good” from the “bad”.
- I cannot emphasize enough the importance of *vipassanā* (*vidassanā*) or insight meditation. [Without the “correct” vision, one could strive for the whole lifetime and not get anywhere](#): one has to understand the true nature of this world (*anicca, dukkha, anatta*), the Four Noble Truths, and the Noble Eightfold Path. It is not memorization, but understanding that counts.

4. A huge amount of defilements are removed from one’s mind with this insight meditation: to understand the “*anicca* nature of this world”. It is the first type of meditation that is needed. One can attain the *Sōtapanna* stage without doing any other types of meditation discussed below. The Buddha once took a bit of soil to a fingertip and told the *bhikkhus* that, “if the amount of defilements a *Sōtapanna* needs to get rid of is comparable to this amount of soil, then a normal human being has to get rid of an equivalent to the soil in the whole Earth”.

- That is not a misprint or an exaggeration. A *Sōtapanna* is bound to attain *Nibbāna* within a maximum of seven “*bhava*”, whereas a normal human being could be trapped in the rebirth process for trillions of years to come. We all have been through the rebirth process for uncountable trillions of years; see, [“Infinity -How Big is It?”](#).
- Many people say, “I do like my life. Why would I not want to be reborn?”. **The problem is that future rebirths may not be in the human realm.** We have no idea what we have done in past lives. Thus even if we live a perfectly moral life, there are no guarantees that we will get a good rebirth. This is why understanding *kamma*, rebirth, etc via insight meditation is important.

5. How does one do the insight meditation? Listening to discourses and reading Dhamma concepts are the two main forms of getting the correct information. Then one could contemplate on those concepts in a sitting meditation. [But reading up on Dhamma concepts during a quiet time itself is meditation; also see, “How to Cultivate the Anicca Sanna”](#) and the follow-up post.

- Once some understanding is reached via *vipassanā* (*vidassanā*) *bhāvanā* or insight meditation, one can start the next two key steps: *mettā bhāvanā* and various forms of *anupassanā bhāvanā*.
- Once one understands the true status of affairs in the wider world of 31 realms, one can really comprehend the amount of suffering that has been hidden from us. With that understanding one can engage in the *Ariya mettā bhāvanā*, which is an excellent way to pay back our old debts to other beings. **This is the second way to purify our minds too.**
- But I hope I have been able to convey the idea that the bulk of work can be done with just insight meditation, contemplating “*anicca, dukkha, anatta*“. However, doing the other two types of *bhāvanā*, i.e., *mettā bhāvanā* and *ānapānasati*, can be helpful for the insight meditation too.

6. The last and third way to purify the mind is via *anupassanā*. *anupassanā* means “discard according to the principles learned” (“*anu*” means according to and “*passana*” means to get rid of; another meaning of “*anu*” is defilements, which is applicable too). *anupassanā* can take various forms: *ānapānasati bhāvanā* is the foundation. Once “*āna*” and “*āpāna*” are sorted out by *vipassanā* (*vidassanā*), one needs to engage in *ānapānasati* all the time. This means one needs to be mindful of what one is about to do, and make sure it is a “right thing to do”.

- When one starts understanding *anicca, dukkha, anatta*, one can start doing the *aniccānupassanā, dukkhānupassanā, and anattānupassanā*, and four more related “*anupassanā*”. I will elaborate on this later.
- *Satipatthāna bhāvanā* (with *kayānupassanā, vedanānupassanā, cittānupassanā, and dhammānupassanā*) includes all the *bhāvanā* techniques that we have discussed so far. It is THE ultimate which encompasses everything that is needed to attain some stress relief all the way to attain the *Arahanthood*. *ānapānasati* is a big part of the *Satipatthāna*, and that is all we need to attain the *Sōtapanna* stage.

7. Thus one could make things simpler by just doing insight meditation, *ānapānasati*, and the *mettā bhāvanā*. That is all one needs to do to have a “better state of mind” or even to become a *Sōtapanna*.

8. The problem with meditation techniques taught even in *Theravada* schools these days is that they are either breath meditation or chantings. How can one remove defilements by watching the breath? Even though it can calm the mind, there are no long-term benefits, because watching the breath CANNOT reduce defilements from the mind.

- Another popular technique is to just contemplate on the impermanence, a popular form of which is to keep repeating something like, “my body is impermanent, it is subjected to decay and death”. Has anyone achieved any progress doing that for even twenty, thirty years? A Buddha does not need to tell us that. All people, belonging to any religion, know those are facts of life.
- Yet another popular “chanting” is to contemplate the “foulness of the body”. That is not what the Buddha meant by the “*patikūla manasikāra bhāvanā*“. Again, everyone knows that our bodies are subject to decay and death; see, “[Maha Satipatthana Sutta](#)“.

Next, “[Ariya mettā bhāvanā \(Loving Kindness Meditation\)](#)“,

5. Ariya Metta Bhavana (Loving Kindness Meditation)

The top 10 posts in this section describe a way of using meditation in following the Noble Path and to attain the *Sotapanna* stage of *Nibbana*. The rest of the posts in this section are on possible meditation subjects and together with other posts at the site can be used to clarify unresolved questions, and to gain *samadhi*. It is recommended that the first 11 posts be followed in that order, at least initially.

1. We all have acquired innumerable “bad *kamma vipaka*” in this cycle of rebirths (*sansara*) that has no beginning. There is a very simple recipe for stopping many of such “bad *kamma vipaka*” from coming to fruition by “wearing out” and ultimately removing the “*kamma* seeds” associated with them.

- We acquire a bad “*kamma* seed” when we do something wrong to a living being, and we become indebted to that being. Just like we can become “debt-free” by paying off debts, we can pay off that debt. The problem is that we have become indebted to innumerable beings in previous rebirths. In the “*Metta Sutta*” (*haliddavasana sutta*) and other *suttas*, the Buddha has explained how much of this debt can be paid off by doing the *Ariya metta bhavana* and also by transferring merits to “all beings” when we do a good deed; see, “[Transfer of Merits \(Pattidana\) – How Does it Happen?](#)“.
- Here we focus on the *Ariya metta bhavana*. First some background material to clarify what this means.

2. The standard *metta bhavana* (loving kindness meditation) goes something like, “May myself and all beings be free of suffering, healthy, happy, and be free of all suffering”, or some similar (longer) passages.

- Any type of such meditation is of course good. It makes your own mind calm down, and makes you think about the (mundane) welfare of the other beings.

3. However, the *Ariya metta bhavana* has a much more deeper meaning. It is done with at least some idea of the complexity of “this world” with 31 realms and the status of the beings in those realms. In order to cultivate true compassion and loving kindness one NEEDS TO FEEL the possible suffering in all those realms; see, “[The Grand Unified Theory of Dhamma](#)“:

- The beings in the lowest four realms (*apayas*) undergo unimaginable suffering, both physical and mental.
- In the lowest five realms (the *apayas* and the human realm), beings have physical bodies that are subject to sicknesses, body aches, and getting old before dying.
- The sixth through eleventh realms are that of the *devas*. They have spontaneous births with fully formed (but less dense) bodies that are not subjected to sickness, aches and pains, and visible signs of old age until close to death. But they also have all five physical senses just like the lower five realms, and could be subjected to repulsive touch, distasteful/unpleasant tastes, smells, and sounds, and visuals.
- The higher 20 realms that include *rupa loka* and *arupa loka* have even less dense bodies than the *devas*, and do not have the physical sense faculties for taste, smell, and body touch. Thus any suffering they have is all mental, and not as intense as in the lower realms.

4. However, no living being is free of FUTURE suffering in any of the 31 realms, because unless the *Sotapanna* stage of *Nibbana* has been attained, even the beings in the highest realm can end up even in the *apayas* (lowest four realms) in future rebirths.

- And the only way to attain the *Sotapanna* stage of *Nibbana* is by comprehending the Three Characteristics of this world of 31 realms: *anicca*, *dukkha*, *anatta*.
- The first level of understanding of *anicca*, *dukkha*, *anatta* leads to the *Sotapanna* stage; when one attains the *Sotapanna* stage, one becomes free from the *apayas* FOREVER. This happens via the inability of the mind of a *Sotapanna* to generate certain *cittas* with “*apayagami*” *kammic* power; see, “[Akusala Citta – How a Sotapanna avoids Apayagami Citta](#)” and “[Conditions for the Four Stages of Nibbana](#)”.
- When the next stage of *Nibbana* (*Sakadagami* stage) is attained, one becomes free of births in the lower five realms where suffering due to physical ailments and diseases are possible. Thus one PERMANENTLY becomes “healthy” by attaining the *Sakadagami* stage.
- At the *Anagami* stage, one removes more *akusala citta* (and other fulfil other conditions; see, “[Conditions for the Four Stages of Nibbana](#)”), and will never be born again in *kama loka* including the *deva* realm. Thus one becomes PERMANENTLY free of any physical suffering.
- Then at the *Arahant* stage, all defilements are removed from the mind and one will never be reborn in any of the 31 realms. The mind truly becomes free and one attains permanent *niramisa sukha*; see, “[The Three Kinds of Happiness – What is niramisa sukha?](#)” and other posts on *niramisa sukha*.
- As you can see, the *Ariya metta bhavana* is similar in structure to the conventional one, but the words have deeper meanings. For example, by saying “be healthy” now it is meant to be healthy forever, i.e., not to be born ever with a body that is subject to diseases and old age.

5. Now we can see how the *Ariya metta bhavana* is formulated:

- “May myself and all living beings attain the *Sotapanna* stage and be free from suffering in the *apayas* forever”
 “May myself and all living beings attain the *Sakadagami* stage and be healthy forever”.
 “May myself and all living beings attain the *Anagami* stage and be content (attain peaceful happiness) forever”.
 “May myself and all living beings attain the *Arahant* stage and be free from all suffering and attain the full *Nibbanic* bliss”.
- All four *Brahma vihara* (*metta*, *karuna*, *mudita*, *upekkha*) are cultivated with this *bhavana*.

6. What matters is not the particular set of word used, but what is felt in one’s heart. In order to do that one needs to truly comprehend that there is REAL SUFFERING in this world, not only at the human or animal realms, but in many other realms.

- The impact of the *metta bhavana* increases gradually with increased understanding of *anicca*, *dukkha*, *anatta*, because then one realizes the dangers and suffering that all living beings face in future lives.
- The potential of the *metta bhavana* is enormous. The Buddha said one could attain the *Anagami* stage by correctly doing the *metta bhavana*. But that entails understanding *anicca*,

dukkha, anatta, i.e., attaining the *Sotapanna* stage or at least embark on the path to *Sotapanna* stage.

- However, even before attaining the *Sotapanna* stage, one could reap many benefits by doing this correct *Ariya metta bhavana*; see, “[Kamma, Debt, and Meditation](#)”.
- It is best to do *Ariya metta bhavana* and *vipassana bhavana* (meditation on *anicca, dukkha, anatta* and other dhamma concepts) in a sitting meditation session every day; see, “[What do all these Different Meditation Techniques Mean?](#)”.
- Initially 10-15 minutes would be good for formal meditation, and can be increased as the *niramisa sukha* sets in one starts seeing the benefits; one could stay in meditation for hours. Of course *anapanasati* needs to be practiced the whole day, which means being aware of what is “taken in” (*ana*) and what is “discarded” (*pana*); see, “[What is Anapana?](#)” and other related posts in the meditation section.
- Listening to discourses and reading about Dhamma are also forms of meditation, and should be done during quiet times so the key concepts can be absorbed.

7. The *Ariya metta bhavana* is one of the most POTENT tools that we have. It is simple concept, but the main difficulty is with the “*Ariya*” part; one needs to comprehend *anicca, dukkha, anatta* for the *bhavana* to be fully effective.

- Still even the mundane version stated in #2 above is good start. As one follows the Path and understands the concepts better (not the book knowledge), the *javana* power in one’s thoughts become strong, and the *bhavana* becomes stronger and more effective.
- In the Abhidhamma language, the most potent *kusala citta* is the “*somanassa sahaḡata nana sampayutta asankhārika citta*”, i.e., the “thought that arises with joy and wisdom automatically”. This thought also gets stronger with increasing wisdom, and gets stronger as one gets to *Sotapanna magga, Sotapanna phala*, etc and optimum only at the *Arahant* stage.
- Yet even when one is following the mundane eightfold path, this *citta* is there, at a lower strength. It needs to be cultivated; see, “[Buddha Dhamma – In a Chart](#)”, and “[What is Unique in Buddha Dhamma](#)”.

Next, “[Anapanasati Bhavana \(Introduction\)](#)”,

6. Anāpānasati Bhāvanā (Introduction)

The top 10 posts in this section describe a way of using meditation in following the Noble Path and to attain the *Sōtapanna* stage of *Nibbāna*. The rest of the posts in this section are on possible meditation subjects and together with other posts at the site can be used to clarify unresolved questions, and to gain *samādhi*. It is recommended that the first 11 posts be followed in that order, at least initially.

1. I hope that several key points are clear from the discussion in the post, “[The Second Level – Key to Purify the Mind](#)”:

- Bad habits (*gathi/āsava*) are associated with one more of immoral or unworthy acts, speech, or thoughts. We need to discard those.
- To counter the bad habits one needs to cultivate good habits. For this we need to cultivate moral behavior by engaging in moral activities that bring joy to the heart.
- AND we need to do this all the time; we cannot let bad habits come back, which means we need to be on the lookout for any lapses in our practice. And we need to be on the lookout for opportunities to do moral acts that are beneficial for oneself and others.

2. The Buddha described *bhāvana* as follows: “*āsevitāya, bhāvitāya, bahuleekathāya,...*” or “keep close association, use often, and use all the time (what is good).....”. [When one is making effort to form a new habit, one should be thinking about it and doing things to support that whenever possible. Trying to do it in a formal meditation session will not be enough.](#)

- We discussed the current scientific explanation of how repeated acts help form habits by strengthening a set of neural connections in the brain in an earlier post in this series. Same thing works to break bad habits by NOT doing it whenever that comes to the mind; existing neural connections will get weaker.
- What is to contemplate: To be mindful to “take in good things (*kusala* or moral things), and to “discard bad things (*akusala* or immoral things)”. This is the real meaning of *ānāpānasati bhāvana*.
- In the wider sense, “*āna*” includes anything that needs to “taken in” for the betterment of life, and “*āpāna*” the opposite. For example, we should eat only foods that are good for the body, and stay away from or discard foods that are bad.
- Nowadays, “*āna*” is taken to be “breath in” and “*āpāna*” is taken to be “breath out”; “*sati*” means mindfulness so, the word “*ānāpānasati*” is interpreted as “mindfully breathing in and mindfully breathing out”. This is the conventional (or “*padaparama*”) interpretation of “*ānāpāna*“, and that is only a very narrow use; see the post below that explains these terms.

3. These aspects are discussed in many suttas. I have a couple of posts that discuss the *Sabbāsava Sutta* (*sabba+āsava* is all *āsavas*), which point out seven specific steps that will help remove bad habits and develop good habits (*gathi/āsavas*).

- Looking at the same goal from a slightly different viewpoint, five such steps are given in the *Vitakkasanthāna* (*vitakka+san+thāna* = removing defiled thoughts) *sutta*; I hope to write a post on this later.

4. Now, with all the discussion we have had up to this point, how can just a process of “breathing in” and “breathing out” mindfully GET RID OF either the bad habits (*gathi/āsāvas*) or the five hindrances?

- Of course that is not possible.
- But it CAN do one thing, as we mentioned before. If we sit in a quiet place with the eyes closed (i.e., turn off the five physical senses in effect), AND fix the mind on the breath, we can get the five hindrances to settle down and not come up (assuming that we are staying away from committing the BIG EIGHT immoral acts).
- However, this calming down or getting to *samatha* is a TEMPORARY solution. The moment we come back to the real world with all its distractions and temptations, those habits take over.

5. The breath meditation needs to be used appropriately, with the understanding that it can provide only temporary relief. This breath meditation is the same meditation that was used by the Hindu *yogis* to attain mundane (*Anāriya*) *jhanas* even before the Buddha.

- Since the time Buddhaghosa’s *Visuddhimagga* was accepted as the basis of Theravada Dhamma (in the fifth century CE), this “literal interpretation” of the *ānāpānasati* has been used.
- The real *ānāpānasati bhāvanā* is not described in the *visuddhimagga*, and is not described in any Mahayana or even Theravada texts today. One needs to go directly to the *Tipitaka* to find it; it is described in many *suttas*, for example the *Assāsa sutta*. I could not find an English translation of this *sutta*. Another one *Arittha Sutta*, and the translation published at the Access to insight site is not complete, even though it does contain Buddha’s admonition to Ven. Arittha that in and out breathing is only one version of *anapanasati* (in the *sutta* it says it is NOT the Ariya or Noble version) : <http://www.accesstoinight.org/tipitaka/sn/sn54/sn54.006.than.html>.

1. Thus there are two interpretations of the *ānāpānasati bhāvana*: one is the conventional “breathing” version and the other is the real version recommended by the Buddha, which has a wider interpretation, including breathing to a minor extent.
- The *Ānāpānasati sutta* is the condensed version of the Buddha’s *desana* on *ānāpānasati bhāvana*. As with most main *suttas*, the discourse was condensed in to the form for easy

transmission. Other *suttas*, mostly by Ven. Sariputta, have explained the terms like “*āna*” and “*āpana*” in detail (like the *Assāsa Sutta*).

- See, “[Is Ānāpānasati Breath Meditation?](#)“, where I provide a detailed discussion based on the *Tipitaka*.
- Furthermore, Sinhala commentaries (*atthakathā*) were also written to explain the main *suttas*. Unfortunately, these *atthakathās* were burned down shortly after Buddhaghosa wrote his *Visuddhimagga* and other books. However, three important ones (*Patisambhida Magga Pakarana*, *Pitakopadesa*, and *Netthipakarana*) have survived because they had been included in the *Tipitaka*. What I describe here is from those books in the *Tipitaka*.
- Buddhaghosa was a Hindu before converting to be a Buddhist later on; see, “The Life and Work of Buddhaghosa” by B. C. Law (1927). Some say he became a Buddhist in order to introduce Hindu concepts to Buddha Dhamma. Either that or he just used whatever he understood to be the *anapanasati* without any malicious intentions. Either way, the correct interpretation had been hidden for all these years; see, “[Buddhaghosa’s Visuddhimagga – A Focused Analysis](#)“.

7. The key message of the Buddha was that we need to remove the greed, hate, and ignorance that we all have in our minds, and by doing that we can experience the *nirāmisā sukha* that is of better quality and of permanent nature. Let us now discuss the basic meditation technique that will start us on the correct path to achieve lasting happiness.

- More evidence from the *Tipitaka*: “[Is Ānāpānasati Breath Meditation?](#)“.

Next, a simple explanation at, “[What is Anapana?](#)“,

7. What is Ānāpāna?

The top 10 posts in this section describe a way of using meditation in following the Noble Path and to attain the *Sōtapanna* stage of *Nibbāna*. The rest of the posts in this section are on possible meditation subjects and together with other posts at the site can be used to clarify unresolved questions, and to gain *samādhi*. It is recommended that the first 11 posts be followed in that order, at least initially.

Revised April 2, 2017 (#4); September 2 (#11)

1. The *Ānāpānasati Sutta* in the *Majjhima Nikaya* ([Ānāpānasati Sutta, MN 118](#)) starts off with the following, just after the very first verse:

Ānāpānassati, bhikkhave, bhāvithā bahulīkathā mahapphalā hoti mahānisansā. Ānāpānassati, bhikkhave, bhāvithā bahulīkathā chattāro satipaṭṭhāna paripūreti. Chattāro satipaṭṭhānā bhāvithā bahulīkathā saptha bojjhaṅga paripūrenti. Saptha bojjhaṅgā bhāvithā bahulīkathā vijjā vimutti paripūrenti.....

That means: “*Ānāpānasati*, *Bhikkhus*, when practiced frequently bears much fruits and leads to much benefits. *Ānāpānasati*, *Bhikkhus*, when cultivated and pursued, brings the four *Satipaṭṭhānas* to their completion. The four *Satipaṭṭhānas*, when cultivated and pursued, bring the seven *bojjangas* to their completion. The seven *bojjangas*, when cultivated and pursued, bring *vijjā* (opposite of *avijjā*) and *vimutti* (or *Nibbāna*) to their completion....”

- Now, if *ānapāna* means “breathing in and breathing out”, how can that lead to the completion of the four *Satipaṭṭhānas*, the seven *bojjangas*, removal of *avijjā*, and the attainment of *Nibbāna*? Can anyone seriously think that is possible?
- Instead, *ānapāna* MEANS cultivating *Satipaṭṭhāna*, *saptha bojjanga*, etc., by “taking in morals” and “expelling immoral” as we discuss below.

2. *Satipatthāna bhāvana* is a more detailed version of the *Ānāpānasati bhāvana*. Thus it is important to learn the correct version of the *Ānāpānasati*. If one does *Ānāpānasati* correctly, it can be easily turned to *Satipatthāna bhāvana*.

3. First let us figure out exactly what the Buddha meant by “*āna*” and “*āpāna*” in “*āna+āpāna+sati*” which rhymes as *ānāpānasati*; of course “*sati*” is mindfulness.

- “*Āna*” is taking in; In Sinhala, “*ānayānaya*” is “import”. “*āpāna*” is discarding; In Sinhala, “*apānayānaya*” is “export”. Thus “*āna*”+“*āpāna*” or *ānapāna* is “taking in/discarding” or import/export.
- “*Assa*” is same as “*āna*”, and “*passa*” is the same as “*āpāna*”. In Sri Lanka, parents tell their child to clean his/her room by saying, “*kāmaraya* (room) *assa passa* (or *aspas*) *karaganna*”.
- When cleaning the room, the child needs to get rid of the clutter (*passa*), but also can take in (*assa*) something like a flower vase to make the room look more pleasant, or to take in a chair that can be useful.

4. During the time of the Buddha itself, auxiliary *suttas* as well as commentaries (“*Atthakatha*”) were written to explain the key words/phrases in the main *suttas* that were abbreviated for easy transmission; see, “[Preservation of Dhamma](#)”. There are two important *suttas*, *Assāsa sutta* and the *Parama Assāsa sutta* that describe how one should “take in” *kusala* thoughts and “discard” *akusala* thoughts; that is “*āna*”+“*āpāna*” (*ānapāna*) or “*assa/passa*”, for cleaning up (the mind).

- In the *Mahasaccaka Sutta*, “*assa/passa*” was also used to indicate “in and out breathing” when the Buddha was describing to Saccaka how he engaged in the “breath meditation” per instructions by Alara Kalama and Uddacaramaputta while he was searching for the truth as Bodhisattva.
- But the very next verses of that *sutta* describes how he gave up on that technique and moved onto the correct path.
- So, we need to be careful about making sure a given phrase is used in the right context, depending on the situation.
- For example, there are several conventional and deeper meanings to the key words “*atta*” and “*anatta*”, and one needs to be able figure out which meaning to use for a given case; see, “[Atta Hi Attano Natho](#)”, “[ānatta – the Opposite of Which Atta?](#)”, and links in those posts.

5. When one knows what *kusala/akusala kamma* are, the first thing to do is to prevent from doing *akusala kamma* and to make an effort to do *kusala kamma* by engaging in meritorious actions (*punna kriya*); see, “[Ten Immoral Actions \(Dasa Akusala\)](#)”, and “[Ten Moral Actions \(Dasa Kusala\) and Ten Meritorious Actions \(Punna Kriya\)](#)”.

- Thus when one leads a moral life, one is automatically engaging in the basic form of *Ānāpānasati*.
- AND one cannot do a proper formal *Ānāpānasati* meditation and get to even *samādhi*, let alone a *jhāna*, unless one leads a moral life. The five hindrances are too strong to be suppressed; see, “[Key to Calming the Mind – Five Hindrances](#)”.

6. **Formal *Ānāpānasati bhāvana*** can be done in a formal sitting or walking meditation session, while engaging in the basic version (taking in what is good/discarding what is bad) all the time.

- There is no need to do *samatha bhāvanā* separately. If one does a formal *Ānāpānasati* session with the eyes closed in a quiet place, one will automatically get into *samādhi*. **Let good thoughts grow, and discard bad thoughts. Very simple.**
- Another thing to do in a formal meditation session is to **contemplate on a particular dhamma concept like *anicca*, *dukkha*, *ānatta*. This is really focusing on “*āna*”.**
- When one gets to *samādhi*, the mind goes on “auto pilot”; you will feel that your mind is taking charge and you need to exert less effort to keep the focus.

1. When one does the basic version while engaged in other activities, one is only being mindful of what one is engaged in, i.e., the task at hand. That task presumably does not involve any of the

BIG EIGHT we discussed previously; see, “[The Basics in Meditation](#)”. It could be a technical task or a daily chore like washing dishes or driving. **Be mindful of just the task (washing, driving, etc).** Here one will NOT get into samādhi, so there is no danger in injuring oneself; Many people get into accidents while driving, because they are not being mindful of driving.

- However, if one does not have a specific task (say, when riding a bus or waiting at the doctor’s office), one could be engaged in *Ānāpānasati bhāvanā*. When our minds are not focused on something (like in the above mentioned cases), all sorts of ideas bubble up. As we discussed in “[The Basics in Meditation](#)”. These are due to deeply-ingrained habits or asavas that we have acquired not only in this life but also from previous lives.

8. The more we keep reviving or re-living this habit (i.e., doing *āna/apāna* or *assa/passa*), we strengthen that good habit (*gathi*).

- We have come all this way in the cycle of rebirths that are mostly filled with suffering because of our bad habits (*gathi*) that have been percolated to very dense state of deep-seated cravings (*āsavas*). It may take some time to develop this “*āna/pāna*”, but you will definitely see results in a few weeks to few months.

9. In the *ānapānapabba* of the *Satipatthāna sutta*, it says, “*..sō satō vā assa sati, satō vā passa sati. Digham vā assasantō digham assasāmi ti pajānāti, digham vā passasantō digham passasāmi ti pajānāti,*” Here it DOES NOT mean “take long breaths in, expel long breaths out”; rather it means, “get rid of old bad habits, and cultivate the old good habits”.

- Similarly, the very next sentence (“*..rassam vā assasantō...*”) is not about short breaths, but on those good habits that you started to work on recently, and those bad habits that started to creep in to the mind recently (if there is any).
- There is no way that one can purify one’s mind by breathing in/out, even though it can get one’s mind to calm down (*samatha*). The correct way of doing it does both *samatha* and *vipassāna* together.

10. When we think a bit more about this, we realize that what needs to be discarded are *miccā ditthi* (wrong views), *miccā sankappa* (wrong thoughts or ideas), *miccā vācā* (incorrect, harmful speech), *miccā kammanta* (incorrect/harmful actions), *miccā ājiva* (incorrect/harmful way of living), *miccā vāyāma* (tendency to strive on immoral activities), *miccā sati* (tendency to focus on immoral activities); when one does all that *miccā samādhi* (tendency to get absorbed in immoral ideas/actions) is the result.

- In the same way, what we need to “take in” are *sammā ditthi*, *sammā sankappa*, *sammā vācā*, *sammā kammanta*, *sammā ājiva*, *sammā vāyāma*, *sammā sati*, and when one keeps doing that one automatically gets to *sammā samādhi*.
- Put it in another way, *Ānāpānasati* is nothing but “taking in” the Noble Eightfold Path and “discarding” the opposite.

11. The longer one “takes in” or “lives” the Noble Eightfold Path and “rejects” the opposite, easier it becomes to get to samādhi in a formal meditation session. When samādhi grows little by little, one day one will automatically get into the first *Ariya jhāna*. However, there is one more thing that is needed before getting to the *Ariya jhānas*: an understanding of *anicca*, *dukkha*, *ānatta*. We will discuss why in a future post.

- Keep practicing “*ānapāna*” as much as possible throughout the day. With time, you will feel the “cooling down” or “*nivana*” or “a taste of *Nibbāna*”.
- Buddha Dhamma is NOT about following rituals. It is all about cleansing one’s mind and that takes an effort and concentration. Initially it could be hard, but as one gains samādhi bit by bit, one gets motivated. In few months one can look back at one’s life and see that it has changed for the better.
- [Even though one can start with discarding immoral deeds and cultivating or taking in moral, one needs to know the real meanings of “*san*”, *anicca* and *anatta* in order to do](#)

the *ānāpānasati bhāvana* in a deeper sense: (i) One needs to comprehend which “*san*” or defilements to be discarded; see, “[San](#)”. (ii) One needs to know the deeper meanings of *Tilakkhana*; see, “[Anicca, Dukkha, Anatta](#)”.

Next, “[Is Ānāpānasati Breath Meditation?](#)”,

Is Ānāpānasati Breath Meditation?

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1. If you Google “Anapanasati”, almost all websites that come up identify it as “Buddhist breath meditation” or “mindfulness of breathing”. But *Tipitaka suttās* clearly lead to the conclusion that breath meditation is not Buddhist *Ānāpāna bhāvanā*.

- Breath meditation was practiced by *yōgis* even at the time of the Buddha. So, breath meditation predates Buddha’s *Ānāpāna bhāvanā*. Buddha rejected it, because it does not lead to *Nibbāna*, or PERMANENT relief from suffering.
- There are many *suttās* in the *Tipitaka* that clearly state that when *Ānāpāna* is followed correctly, that automatically fulfills *Satipatthāna*, *Saptha Bojjanga*, and all 37 Factors of Enlightenment, and leads to *Nibbāna*. **Therefore, *Ānāpānasati* is infinitely more deeper than just focusing on one’s breath.**
- I will provide evidence for those two statements below. First, let us see what can be accomplished with Buddhist *Ānāpānasati bhāvanā*.

2. According to the [Ānāpānassati Sutta \(MN 118\)](#): “*..Ānāpānassati, bhikkhave, bhāvitā bahulīkatā cattāro satipaṭṭhāne paripūreti. Cattāro satipaṭṭhānā bhāvitā bahulīkatā satta bojjhaṅge paripūrenti. Satta bojjhaṅgā bhāvitā bahulīkatā vijjāvimuttiṃ paripūrenti.*”

- Translated, “*..Ānāpānassati, when used (bhāvitā) and used frequently (bahulīkatā), completes (paripūreti) four types of Satipatthāna. Cattāro satipaṭṭhāna, when used and used frequently, completes Sapta Bojjanga. Sapta Bojjanga when used and used frequently, completes the full release (Nibbāna or Arahant hood)*”.
- Exactly the same statement was made in the [Ananda Sutta \(SN 54.13\)](#). In fact, most of the *suttās* in [Ānāpāna Samyutta \(SN 54\)](#) has that phrase or the phrase: “*..Ānāpānassati, bhikkhave, bhāvitā bahulīkatā mahapphalā hoti mahānisamsā*”. Here, “*mahappalā*” (“*mahā*” + “*pala*”) means the four Noble stages: *Sotapanna, Sakadagami, Anagami, Arahant*.
- Therefore, it is quite clear that *ānāpānassati*, **by itself**, can lead to all the way to the *Arahant hood*. Thus, one does not need to do “**separate vipassanā (insight) meditation after getting to samatha with ānāpānassati**” as some suggest.

3. The next key question is: “Can breath meditation, by itself, lead to Arahant hood?” This is the critical question that needs to be contemplated by those who believe that *Ānāpānassati* means breath meditation.

- *Nibbāna* is removal of greed, hate, ignorance: “*rāgakkhayō dōsakkhayō mōhakkhayō idaṃ vuccati nibbānanti*”. This verse is in many *suttās*, for example, in [Nibbāna pañhā Sutta \(SN 38.1\)](#).
- If *Ānāpānassati* means breath meditation, how could keeping the mind on one’s breath **by itself** REMOVE *rāga, dōsa, mōha* from one’s mind?

4. The conventional (and erroneous) teaching in many texts today is that one needs to get to samādhi with Ānāpānassati and then one needs to do Vipassanā or insight meditation to attain magga phala.

- However, from the above discussed *suttās* it is quite clear that *Ānāpānassati* **by itself** can lead to even the *Arahant hood*!

- Of course this erroneous interpretation — that breath meditation is Buddhist *Ānāpāna bhāvanā* — is not something that current practitioners came up with. It can be traced back to Buddhaghosa’s *Visuddhimagga*, see, “[Buddhaghosa’s Visuddhimagga – A Focused Analysis](#)”.

5. The incorrect version of *Ānāpānassati* was there even before the Buddha. In the [Arittha Sutta \(SN 54.06\)](#), the Buddha, upon finding out that *Bhikkhu Arittha* was practicing the incorrect breath meditation as *Ānāpānassati* told him, “..*Atthesā, ariṭṭha, ānāpānassati, nesā natthī’ti vadāmi. Api ca, ariṭṭha, yathā ānāpānassati vitthārena paripunnā hoti taṃ suṇāhi, sādhukaṃ manasi karohi; bhāsissāmi*”ti.

- Translated, “..**There is that *ānāpānassati, Arittha***. I don’t say that there isn’t. But I will describe the real (*yathā*) *ānāpānassati*, listen and pay close attention. I will speak.”
- Furthermore, that incorrect version of breath meditation was used by *yōgis* at that time even to attain higher *jhāna*. However, those *anāriya jhāna* are attained by just SUPPRESSING defilements (*keles*), and will not lead to ANY *magga phala*. Those who cultivate such *anāriya jhāna* will also have next birth in *Brahma* realms, but after that they can be reborn even in the *apāyās*.

6. The main reason for the incorrect interpretation of *Ānāpānassati* as breath meditation is that in many *suttās* it is described as *assāsa/passāsa*, which conventionally means taking in/putting out of something, and particularly to breathing in/breathing out.

- In fact, *āna/āpāna* (which rhymes as *ānāpāna*) also mean taking in/putting out, as we discuss below.
- However, in the *suttās* on *Ānāpānassati*, *assāsa/passāsa* or *āna/pāna* specifically mean taking in *kusala*/getting rid of *akusala*, or, equivalently, taking in the Noble Eightfold Path/discarding the *miccā* eightfold path.
- That should be clear to anyone who knows that *Nibbāna* is attained via getting rid of *dasa akusala*.

7. In the [assāsa Sutta \(SN38.5\)](#), it is specifically said what needs to be “taken in” (*assāsa*):

- “*Katamo panāvuso maggo katamā paṭipadā etassa assāsassa sacchikiriyāyāti* (what needs to be “taken in”). *Ayameva kho āvuso ariyo aṭṭhaṅgiko maggo etassa assāsassa sacchikiriyāya* (it is the Noble Eightfold Path that needs to be “taken in”). *Seyyathīdam* (namely): *sammādiṭṭhi sammāsaṅkappo sammāvācā sammākammanto sammāājīvo sammāvāyāmo sammāsati sammāsamādhi*”.
- [Parama assāsa Sutta \(AN38.6\)](#) has the same statement, emphasizing with the term “*parama*” or “superior”.
- Therefore, there should not be any confusion about what *assāsa* means.

8. A detailed description of how the cultivation of correct *Ānāpānassati* leads to *Ariya jhānas* as well as *magga phala* is described in the [Paṭipopama sutta \(SN 54.8\)](#), also called the *Dipa Sutta*.

- “*So satōva assasati, satōva passasati*” means “He maintains his mind on *dhamma* that should be taken in (*kusala* or moral) and those that should be gotten rid of (*akusala* or immoral)”.
- “*paṭinissaggānupassī assasissāmi’ti sikkhati, paṭinissaggānupassī passasissāmi’ti sikkhati*” means, “one cultivates discipline (*sikkhati*) by removing bonds that binds one to the rebirth process (*patinissaganupassī*) by taking in morals (*assasissāmi*) and getting rid of immorals (*passasissāmi*)”.

9. As is the case with many Pāli words, the meaning of the word *Ānāpāna* is embedded in the word itself. The two words “*āna*” and “*āpāna*” combine to rhyme as *ānāpāna*. When “*sati*” is added for being mindful of that, it becomes *ānāpānassati*.

- “*Āna*” is taking in; In Sinhala, “*ānayanaya*” is “import”. “*Āpāna*” is discarding; In Sinhala, “*apanayanaya*” is “export”. Thus “*āna*+”*āpāna*” or *anapana* is “taking in/discarding” or import/export.

- “Assa” is same as “āna”, and “passa” is the same as “āpāna”. In Sri Lanka, parents tell their child to clean his/her room by saying, “*kāmaraya (room) assa passa (or aspas) karāganna*”.
- When cleaning the room, the child needs to get rid of the clutter (*passa*), but also can take in (*assa*) something like a flower vase to make the room look more pleasant, or to take in a chair that can be useful.
- So, one does not throw away everything or take in everything. One needs to be selective in taking in “good things” and throwing away “bad things”. That is where mindfulness comes in. That cannot be done with breath.

10. Most people are reluctant to give up the wrong practice of “breath meditation” simply because they are attached to the “state of well being” that can be reached with breath meditation. But that relief is only temporary.

- It is even possible to attain *anāriya jhānas* with breath meditation, but those *jhānas* are also temporary, because the defilements are only SUPPRESSED. On the other hand, the *Ariya jhānas* attained via correct *Ānāpānasati bhāvanā* are permanent even in future rebirths because deeply-hidden defilements (*anusaya*) are REMOVED.
- It must also be mentioned that breath mediation can be used to calm down one’s mind. But one should not expect to make much progress towards *Nibbāna* using it. **In fact, if one gets “addicted” to it (as I have seen many people do), it could be a serious distraction to the Noble Path.**

11. As I have emphasized in the “[Bhāvanā \(Meditation\)](#)” and the “[Maha Satipatthana Sutta](#)“, one should not restrict either *Ānāpānasati* or *Satipatthāna bhāvanā* to formal sessions conducted sitting down at an isolated place.

- When the Buddha said, “*..Ānāpānassati, bhikkhave, bhāvitā bahulīkatā..*” in #2 above, he meant doing it as much as possible, anywhere possible. That means basically all the time! One just needs to be mindful of one’s actions, speech, and thoughts, and stop bad ones and cultivates good ones.
- This is the fundamental approach to practice, see, “[Living Dhamma](#)” section for a step-by-step process that can be used by even those who do not believe in the basic tenets of Buddha Dhamma, like rebirth or *kamma*.

12. Some people believe that *Ānāpānasati* or *Satipatthāna bhāvanā* should be done in formal sessions, because of the verse, “*Idha, bhikkhave, bhikkhu aranna gato vā rukkhamūla gato vā sunnāgāra gato vā nisidati pallankaṃ ābhujitvā, ujum kāyaṃ pañidhāya, parimukhaṃ satim upaṭṭhapetvā*”, that appears in multiple *suttās* explaining both *Ānāpānassati* and *Satipatthāna bhāvanā*.

- **In most English translations** this verse is written as, “[There is the case where a monk, having gone to the wilderness, to the foot of a tree, or to an empty building, sits down folding his legs crosswise, holding his body erect, and setting mindfulness to the fore](#)”.
- But there is a deeper meaning to this verse. For example, in the word “*rukkhamūla*“, “*rukkha*” is “tree” and “*mūla*” is the “root”; even though the top of a tree sways back and forth with the wind, the tree trunk close to the root is very stable. Thus “*rukkhamūla gatō vā*” means getting to a stable mindset. In the conventional interpretation it says, “having gone to the foot of a tree”.
- The **deeper meaning** of that complete verse is discussed in detail in, “[Prerequisites for the Satipatthāna Bhāvanā](#)“. Then the verse can be stated something like, “[get into a calm and stable mindset that is devoid of greed, hate, and ignorance; keep a modest attitude without any sense of superiority; be forthright and honest, and keep the mind on the main object of cooling down the mind](#)”. That can be done anywhere, a formal session is not needed, even though that could be helpful.
- One could also use the conventional meaning for formal sessions. But of course, it is the deeper meaning that is much more important even in formal sessions.

13. If anyone has any evidence to the contrary **from the Tipitaka**, please make a comment at the “[Discussion Forum](#)“. I will be happy to address any such issues.

- Other than the three commentaries (*Patisambhidamagga*, *Petakopadesa*, and *Nettipakarana*) that are included with the *Tipitaka*, all other commentaries written later have many inconsistencies and outright misinterpretations; see, for example, “[Buddhaghosa’s Visuddhimagga – A Focused Analysis](#)”.